

# Persuasion's Role in the Public Education Campaign

**Y**our mission in a public education campaign is to change the behaviors of those people who are likely to misuse and improperly dispose of pesticides. To change attitudes and behaviors there must be an element of persuasion included in the campaign. Persuasion can be defined as the act of influencing a person to make a desirable choice. For the purpose of your public education campaign, you are attempting to influence homeowners to use and dispose of pesticides properly.

Throughout the public education effort, most of the communications should serve the purpose of influencing people's behavior. Whether the campaign's goal is to encourage people to conserve energy, stop littering or use and dispose of pesticides wisely, the goal is to influence their behavior. The communication tools — such as bill inserts, brochures, advertisements, special events etc., should persuade people to take action with specific suggestions for taking action. For example, when describing to consumers how to properly dispose of pesticides, suggest the following:

*Dispose of all empty pesticide containers by placing them in the garbage for shipment to a landfill. For unused dry pesticides, wrap individual packages in several layers of newspapers and tape or*

*tie the package closed. Place these wrapped packages in the garbage.*



**The persuasive power of a message or a campaign is dependent upon several factors. People will take into account the evidence presented, the source of the information, and the impact the issue has on them. The evidence is the factual information available that describes the problem. Evidence about the impact of pesticides on water quality is not difficult to find. Make the evidence compelling for your target audience. The source of the information is your agency, and any partners you choose to include on your materials. The impact is how pesticide use directly affects the target audience. Homeowners must understand why they should care about how use and disposal of pesticides. For example, you may appeal to your customers' environmental concerns. Or you may point out that as ratepayers, they could face higher costs if water quality declines.**

Persuasion in a public education campaign should never attempt to manipulate people or propagandize issues. Persuasion is based on truthful information and the presentation of messages through various forms of communication.

# Gaining Support from Community Leaders

The goal of any public education campaign is to generate greater awareness for your program and issue. One way to increase the visibility of your campaign is to solicit the involvement of key community leaders. These people may hold a variety of positions within the community, but they are all individuals who are easily recognizable to citizens.

Key community leaders may include, but are not limited to:

- Mayors
- City council members
- County supervisors
- Assembly members
- State senators
- City/county government department heads
- Professors at local universities and colleges
- Prominent business leaders
- Community activists
- Executive directors of relevant non-profit organizations
- Civic leaders
- Media personalities

Having a community leader associated with your program can help you in many ways. It helps get the word out about what you are trying to do. A community leader who knows about your program may be more likely to bring it up in

conversation with other people.

Endorsements from community leaders give your program a heightened sense of credibility, as long as the leader is a trustworthy source.

Before you approach a community leader, formulate a specific request for help. Do you want an endorsement? Would you like the leader to publicize your program during a meeting or conference? Would you like them to mention it to other key community contacts? Be very clear about the leader's role. It may help to write your objectives for each person you want to approach.

Before you contact any community leaders, make sure you have the backup and support material needed to convince them that they should take notice of your program. Your first approach should be in writing. Many community leaders receive dozens of phone calls and requests each day, so written materials will give them the opportunity to review the program at their convenience. Include a brief cover letter with one or two pages of information attached. Don't overload the letter with a lot of details. In the letter, state that you will follow up within the next week, and do so promptly. Don't be discouraged if your call is not returned right away. Be persistent without being pushy.

Gaining support from community leaders is just the first step. Once these people are part of your program, work to maintain a relationship with them. Stay

in contact with the leaders on a regular basis. This can be done via e-mail, fax or phone. Do not interrupt them with calls unless it is very important. Even if you don't need help right away, keep your contacts updated. Send regular progress reports and ask for support along the way. Invite your key community leaders to any special event. This not only makes them feel important, but gives them

additional opportunities to become involved with your program.

Once you establish key community contacts, keep the relationship going. Even when your campaign ends, drop notes to your community leaders to keep them up to date on your facility and any other news you may have. These contacts will prove valuable.

## Key Months for Conducting a Campaign

Every issue has its season. Therefore, it makes sense that some times are better than others for a public education campaign on pesticides. In a 1996 survey of POTWs, **the most common months for campaigns were April, May and June**. The least desirable dates were November, December and January. Taking into account that a key target audience is home gardeners, it stands to reason that the campaigns were carried out when growing season begins.

It is logical that a pesticide-oriented campaign would occur and have the greatest chance for success during the growing season. California's weather provides for a longer-than-average season, and the exact times for the growing season will vary depending on your area.

Avoid campaign dates that coincide with major holidays or other special events

that may distract public attention. Check for significant dates in your community with your convention visitors bureau or chamber of commerce. They usually have master calendars of upcoming events. Also remember that many people go on vacations in June, July and August. A campaign during this time may not be as effective as one that runs in March or April. In addition, people tend to purchase more gardening supplies at the beginning of the spring growing season.

Also keep in mind that no matter when you schedule your campaign, it is essential to begin planning several months in advance. If you plan to conduct your campaign in March, it is wise to begin planning at least the previous summer or sooner. You will need this lead time to create partnerships, set up special events, and prepare materials.